SOME THOUGHTS ON THE PANCHA MAHABUTA
Yogacharya Dr Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani

All systems of Indian philosophy (Shat Darshana etc) and healing (Ayurveda, Siddha etc) give importance to the Pancha Maha Bhuta, the five major elements of the manifest world. These are Pritvi or Bhumi (earth), Apas or Jala (water), Tejas or Agni (fire), Vayu (air), and Akasha (ether or space).

This is slightly different from the European system that focuses primarily on the first four elements neglecting Akasha that is the most subtle. The Maha Bhutas are considered the grossest manifestation in our journey from Purusha - Prakriti ones to the gross existence on this worldly plane. They are also the starting point for our return journey back home sweet home to the ultimate oneness of OM.

I have been contemplating the Pancha Maha Bhutas recently and have realized that these universal elements have both positive and negative connotations!

Pritvi refers to the cohesive aspects of solid material that is tightly bound together. This is the firm foundation upon which we can begin our journey. It implies a positive sense of stability but also can imply a negative stubborn refusal to change! It can often be the hard rock that prevents our growth. It can also be the worst of dirt that blemishes us and makes us impure. When people throw dirt on us, it is up to us to make it manure and utilize it to further our growth. If we don’t do this, then we will be bogged down resulting in a sooner than later permanent visit to the cemetery.

Apas refers to a diplomatic ability of adaptation to the environment in a fluid manner. It is a nice ‘liquid’ quality and enables one to often live a comparatively “stress free” life. Water when thrown on us can either clean us or put out the fire of aspiration too. Some people water the garden but most tend to try and put out the flame of creativity. Water may induce a sense of ‘wishy-washy-ness’ that prevents one from doing what must be done as part of one’s Dharmic responsibilities. When the water finds its rightful balance it is lovely, but if not, it can create a tsunami in our growth!

Tejas can be the fire of aspiration, creatively and motivation. Yet, if one is not careful it is very easy to get burnt. There are so many who have a “fire in their belly”. This thermal state can be a double edged sword as it can
motivate some to do their best but it can also create indigestion in many resulting in 'burn out'. Fire can be the light of wisdom when it is a steady flame but it can also destroy everything if it is an unstable inferno.

Vayu may be the gentle breeze that relaxes us and reinvigorates us. It can be the inner ability to move with the flow of energy. Yet, if one is not conscious it can be the whirlwind or tornado that crates havoc everywhere. When the internal wind-like energy (Vata or Pawan) is balanced the nervous energies flow in a balanced manner and if not, great instability of the whole nervous system can destroy our health. Too much of gas in the system is bad and too much of it in the ego leads to real 'bloated heads' that are none too pleasant. 'Airy fairy' types with no connection to reality abound in the world today and most need a bit of deflating by ego-dectomies. That was Pujya Swamiji's specialty, especially the ones he did without anesthesia!

Akasha is the grand space that enables us to grow in all directions and dimensions. It is the most subtle of the elements and gives us the maximum freedom. With maximum freedom comes the highest responsibility. So many of us tend to misuse freedom and think that we are free to do the wrong things! A tendency to be scattered and loose focus on the goal is another negative aspect of this element when it is not used in a conscious and aware manner. Instead of expanding our consciousness, we may end up totally scattered and stretched out beyond our breaking point thus breaking ourselves ultimately. Giving space to people is good if they are responsible but others may need to be guided in other ways.

The final analysis of this whole concept makes us realise that the difference between the positive and negative aspects of the elements rests ultimately in our hands. If we are conscious and aware, we can maximize the positives resulting in our growth. If we choose not to do so, then the negatives will result in our destruction.

The choice is ours!!